

**Partnerships for a Healthy Region (PHR)
Strengthening Health Workforce in the Pacific (Nursing and Midwifery) (SHWP)**

Brief: Palau Country Visit – 25 to 29 August 2025

Background

The Palau Country Visit took place between 25th to 29th August as part of the Strengthening Health Workforce in the Pacific (SHWP) Program under the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) five-year Partnerships for a Healthy Region (PHR) initiative (2024-2028). The WHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing, Midwifery & Health Development at University of Technology Sydney (WHO CCNM UTS) manages the SHWP program, in partnership with South Pacific Chief Nursing & Midwifery Officers Alliance (SPCNMOA). The SHWP Program aims to strengthen Pacific health systems to improve the quality of and access to health care and population health across the Pacific, aligning strongly with the WHO Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery (SDNM) and the State of the World’s Nursing (SoWN) Report’s key areas and policy priorities of leadership, education, jobs and service delivery.



Fellows from the 2024 and 2025 Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) with Prof. Michele Rumsey and Ms Amanda Neill

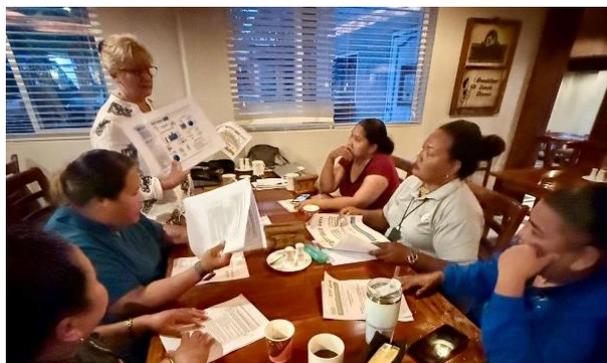
Purpose of the visit

This visit to the western Pacific island country (PIC) of Palau focused on gathering background information and relationship building for future health system strengthening efforts, particularly in the area of nursing workforce development. As part of the SHWP initiative, this scoping visit was conducted to assess the current state of nursing regulation, education, and related workforce issues. Through engagement with key stakeholders including the Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) Ms Antonnette Merur and Fellows from the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) delivered by the WHO CCNM UTS in Sydney in 2024 (Louisa Benaya and Adeline Franz) and 2025 (Cheryl Lee Ongalibang and Carolynn Ngiraswei), the gathering of preliminary real time insights and identification of gaps and opportunities will inform future technical support and policy development for nursing in this country and the region. This visit aimed to help the team from WHO CCNM UTS – Prof. Michele



Ms Clarette Matlab, Acting Director, Bureau of Hospital Services with Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) Ms Antonnette Merur from the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS)

Rumsey and Ms Amanda Neill – begin to understand the regulatory frameworks, educational pathways, and workforce challenges facing nurses in Palau, with a view to supporting sustainable improvements aligned with Pacific regional frameworks.



Prof. Michele Rumsey in discussion with the PLP Fellows from Palau.

SHWP Project Outcomes (POs)

PO1 Leadership and Governance: Nursing and Midwifery leaders have strengthened leadership skills/capability for more effective and inclusive health governance, policy development and management.

PO2 Gender equality and disability inclusion: are mainstreamed into Nursing and Midwifery education, leadership, regulation, standards of practice in the region

PO3 Regulation: Regional regulation is strengthened to increase the quality and effectiveness of the health workforce in the Pacific

PO4 Education: Regional competency standards for foundational and advanced nursing and midwifery education and practice are strengthened.

PO5 Sustainability: Health Partnerships are established to ensure program sustainability, relevance, value, appropriateness, efficiency and responsiveness.

Pacific Leadership Program

In 2025-2026, WHO CCNM UTS and Fellows from the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) (2025) will facilitate workshops in all 13 countries involved in

SHWP. These workshops are led by the PLP Fellows from the 2024 and 2025 programs to set up Taskforce and engage national actors and stakeholders in identifying system-level strengths and challenges across education, regulation, service delivery, governance, to establish a common understanding and co-develop and prioritise actions for strengthening nursing and midwifery registration, regulation, and workforce planning through multi-stakeholder collaboration and regional alignment.

Meetings, consultations and other activities

Meetings and consultations were held by Prof. Michele Rumsey and Amanda Neill with a variety of key stakeholders during the visit. These meetings focused on relationship building and provided an opportunity to gain knowledge and deeper insights into nursing and midwifery in Palau, particularly in relation to regulation, education and other areas impacting the health workers, leaders and the profession in the country.



Ms Amanda Neill (WHO CCNM UTS), Ms Antonnette Merur (MHHS), Prof. Michele Rumsey (WHO CCNM UTS) and Dr Gregory Dever (MHHS).

Meetings were held with the following stakeholders:

Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS)

- An initial meeting was held with Ms Clarette Matlab, Acting Director, Bureau of Hospital Services and Ms Antonnette Merur, Chief Nursing Officer (CNO) from the Palau Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) and a number of subsequent meetings followed with the CNO;

- Dr Gregory Dever, Director, Bureau of Hospital and Clinical Services at MHHS and Chair of the Health Professionals Board.

Palau Community College (PCC)

- Dr. Patrick U. Tellei, President of the Palau Community College (PCC), with Nursing Program Instructor Ms Margaret Wicker.



Stakeholder consultation with the CNO and Dr Tellei, President of Palau Community College (PCC), with Nursing Program Instructor Ms Maggie Wicker.

Australian Embassy

- Meeting was held with DFAT Post at Australian Embassy in Palau, Mr Toby Sharpe Ambassador; Ms Cami Pesava, Second Secretary; Ms Clarissa Adelbai, Senior Program Manager on Thursday 28 August.



The WHO CCNM UTS team with Ms Cami Pesava, Mr Toby Sharpe and Ms Clarissa Adelbai from the Australian Embassy.

Review of Palau legislation

A rapid review of the current legislation (Palau Health Professionals Licencing Act) was conducted whilst the team were in Palau. The outcomes were shared and discussed with relevant stakeholders including the CNO and PLP Fellows. Issues including

committee structures and memberships for health professions were highlighted and it was suggested that these are revisited to provide support for the nursing profession in the future.

Meetings with the PLP Fellows

Two meetings were held with the PLP Fellows from 2024 and 2025 cohorts with their mentor Ms Kimberly Idip, Nursing Manager, Hospital Nursing Services, with the WHO CCNMU UTS team once approval was given by the A/Director Hospital Services to proceed. Early in the week talks focused on current issues and challenges the fellows are facing professionally, and their work for the PLP. The fellows outlined progress with establishment of the taskforce and plans were made to discuss the future country workshop.

In the final meeting with PLP Fellows for the visit, the fellows and their mentor planned the next taskforce meeting on 10 September, and agreed on a regular meeting schedule. It was also proposed that the SHWP Palau Country Workshop be held on 18 and 19 March 2026 following approval from senior MHHS leaders.

Opening of the Nursing and Science Building, PCC

Prof. Michele Rumsey attended the opening of the new Nursing and Science building at the PCC on 29 August, that was attended by the President of Palau, Mr Surangel Samuel Whipps Jr. and other dignitaries.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL)

Baseline and other preliminary primary data were collected by Amanda Neill through semi-structured interviews with senior staff and the PLP Fellows from the MHHS. Findings from this data will inform MERL target setting, and SHWP Program decision-making and reporting.

Review and Key Outcomes from the visit

Information gathered and subsequent issues were reviewed by the five regulation framework areas

and following the consultations. The gaps and recommendations for action were reviewed and agreed with the CNO.

Special thanks

To DFAT for funding this preliminary visit to Palau through PHR, and to the Acting Director of Hospital Services for her time to meet with the WHO CCNM UTS team with the CNO, and support granted to the CNO Office. We also thank the Australian Ambassador and team at the Australian Embassy for their support of the PHR and the SHWP Program.

Next steps:

- Provide a brief of the in-country visit to relevant stakeholders.
- Continue support for next four years under PHR.
- Work across the region to assist countries and help develop / revise regulatory guides and standards as required.
- Continue support for ongoing country work.
- Return to Palau for a follow up national workshop in the first quarter of 2026.
- Follow up discussions with donors regarding opportunities for urgent country professional training options for midwifery, BN, Masters level programs.

Palau Case Study

Palau - Education - Stakeholders reported that in-country accredited professional education programs for nursing had the best outcomes in relation to graduates remaining in Palau to work. This is particularly important in a country with reported nursing and midwifery workforce shortages.

The CNO explained that a previous arrangement with the Fiji National University (FNU) saw 18 nursing students complete the nursing program and graduate successfully. Teaching was delivered through a combination of FNU lecturers in-country and through remote learning. All of these nurses

remained in Palau once they had graduated, with the majority joining the nursing workforce. This is in contrast to evidence that nurses from Palau who travel to the USA for training, with most not returning to Palau to work once they have graduated.



Nursing Program Instructor Ms Maggie Wicker with some of the current cohort of nursing students in the new Nursing and Science Building at PCC.